



INTERNATIONAL  
OLYMPIC  
COMMITTEE

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President

## Opening speech to the 136<sup>th</sup> IOC Session Videoconference

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Last year we celebrated Olympic Day with the opening of our Olympic House as one of the most sustainable buildings in the world. Whereas last year the focus was on sustainability, this year we highlighted health: half a billion people all around the globe were introduced to our #StayStrong #StayActive #StayHealthy campaign through the world's biggest digital Olympic workout.

This amazing success is the result of our many efforts and the measures we undertook to protect people's health and lives from the very beginning of the coronavirus crisis. We started the campaign ahead of World Health Day to make it even more evident how important sport is for physical and mental health, in particular in times of lockdown, social distancing and uncertainty.

But the importance of sport goes beyond health. Sport has a great social significance by being the glue which bonds communities together. Sport has a great economic significance by creating jobs and generating an important contribution to GDP. For all these reasons sport is an essential factor not only during the crisis but also for the recovery from the crisis. This is why we have repeatedly called on the governments to include sport in their corona recovery programmes. And our actions have been recognised and our message has been understood by many:

- 118 United Nations (UN) Member States issued a joint statement in this respect;
- The G20 Leaders' Summit expressed its appreciation for our efforts to safeguard people's health;
- The EU Council acknowledged these important roles of sport as well;
- A number of governments have already included sport in their national recovery programmes and others have promised to do so;
- With the World Health Organization (WHO) we signed a cooperation agreement;
- The UN and the WHO joined hands with us in a rare co-branded campaign called "HealthyTogether".



Already these few examples demonstrate that the relevance of sport and of our values has been significantly strengthened in this otherwise dark time of a deep worldwide crisis.

All this would not have been possible without the unified, powerful support of so many. I would like to express our heartfelt thanks in particular to the International Federations (IFs), the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), the athletes, our Japanese partners and friends, our TOP Partners and Rights-Holding Broadcasters (RHBs), the Organising Committees, the WHO, the United Nations and of course to you, the IOC Members and to all our staff for this incredible show of unity and resolve.

But this crisis is far from over. As I outlined in my “Olympism and Corona” message last April, this situation will need all our solidarity, creativity, determination and flexibility. We all will need to make sacrifices. We are only beginning to understand which of the three scenarios for the post-corona world that I outlined in my message will finally prevail. Unfortunately, we are already seeing clear signs in some parts of the world that the one scenario is on the rise, where society and nations are driven by even more egoism and self-interest. This leads to more confrontation and to the politicisation of all aspects of life: culture, economy, health, science, humanitarian aid; even the fight against doping is already being targeted.

During the IOC Session in January this year I already highlighted the growing misuse of sport for political purposes as one of our biggest challenges. I am afraid that this threat to sport is even bigger now. In some people’s minds the ghosts of the past are rearing their ugly heads. Boycotts and discrimination because of political background or nationality are once again a real danger. This is all the more unfortunate as this comes exactly 40 years after the completely unsuccessful boycott of the Olympic Games Moscow 1980 by some countries. It appears that today, some just do not want to learn anything from history: that such sporting boycotts do not have any political effect whatsoever. The Soviet army stayed nine long more years in Afghanistan after the boycott. A sporting boycott only punishes the athletes of the boycotting country and deprives their people of sharing in the success, pride and joy of their Olympic team. The only political effect the boycott of 1980 had, was to trigger the revenge boycott of the following Olympic Games Los Angeles 1984.



Therefore, we must even strengthen our efforts to convince governments and the entire international community of the irreplaceable value of the Olympic Games. It is the only event today that brings the entire world together in peace, solidarity and without any discrimination.

This non-discrimination has been at the core of the Olympic Games since the days of our founder Pierre de Coubertin who said: "We shall not have peace until the prejudices that now separate the different races are outlived. To attain this end, what better means is there than to bring the youth of all countries periodically together for amicable trials of muscular strength and agility." These words are still true today.

With the Olympic Games we are walking this talk. The athletes from the 206 National Olympic Committees and of the IOC Refugee Olympic Team are living this value of non-discrimination. This was demonstrated in a unique way by Jesse Owens, the legendary four-time Olympic champion. At home, he had to suffer from the painful reality of racial segregation. In contrast, in the Olympic Village, he was living together as an equal with all the other athletes enjoying the same rights. Through his outstanding sporting achievements, he taught a resounding lesson to the Nazi regime, shattering their despicable fascist claims of racial superiority. He befriended his German competitor Luz Long, creating iconic Olympic moments of respect and solidarity.

In fact, the corona crisis shows us again that to respect each other is not enough. We have to help each other. The major lesson is: We need more solidarity within societies and among societies.

The great Olympic Champion Muhammad Ali, who had the Olympic Flag as one of just two flags flying at his funeral, expressed it in this way: "I have learned that whatever time we spend on earth should be spent helping others and creating justice and equality for all people, not out of pity or shame, but out of love for all people with the knowledge that we belong not to many races, but to one race – the human race."

These words perfectly mirror the philosophy and action of our Olympic Solidarity, which benefits all athletes from all NOCs and from all Olympic sports. 90 per cent of our revenues are dedicated to such solidarity actions. This solidarity is also at the heart of our corona crisis management, as reflected by the approval of an aid package of up to 150 million US dollars



for our stakeholders to enable them to continue their support and their sports activities. We are walking the talk also through the IOC Refugee Olympic Team and the Olympic Refugee Foundation which in the relatively short time of its existence reaches already over 200,000 displaced young people and their host communities.

For all these reasons we can say with confidence: Solidarity and non-discrimination are in our DNA. Therefore, we appreciate all the athletes and anybody who supports these values by expressing themselves or who are helping others by engaging in their communities. In this context we have to make some remarks with regards to the discussion about Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter. It is important to emphasise that the athletes have already multiple opportunities to express their views also during the Olympic Games: press conferences, mixed zones, social media, interviews, team meetings and others. Rule 50 addresses only the field of play and the ceremonies. To reconcile these values of free expression on the one hand and respect for each other on the other hand, the IOC Athletes Commission has initiated a dialogue among athletes on how they can even better express their support for the Olympic values in a dignified and non-divisive way.

In this spirit of solidarity, we are also preparing the postponed Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. I would like to thank our Japanese partners and friends headed by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, Organising Committee President Mori Yoshiro, Governor Koike Yuriko and all the Summer Olympic IFs, the NOCs, the athletes, our TOP Partners and RHBs and of course in particular you, the IOC Members. Without your solidarity, without your support we could not have taken this historic decision. Now we have a mammoth task ahead of us for which your continued solidarity is essential. Organising these postponed Olympic Games is very different to organising Olympic Games in normal circumstances. Nobody knows today how the world will look like in July and August next year. This is why we have to prepare for multiple scenarios of these Games. We have to take into account all the potential health implications and their consequences for the Games. The top priority for all these scenarios remains the one we have established already before the postponement decision: to safeguard the health of all participants of the Olympic Games.

With our Japanese partners and friends, we agree that we have to adapt the planning to the requirements of the global crisis, while maintaining the unique spirit and message that define our mission. During this Session the Organising Committee and our Coordination Commission



will outline how we will optimise the operations and services without touching on sports and athletes. In this way we can, together with the Organising Committee, turn these postponed Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 into an unprecedented celebration of unity and solidarity of humankind, making them a symbol of resilience and hope.

Already the ancient Greeks knew that every crisis offers opportunities. This is why with my “Olympism and Corona” message I have initiated the discussion about the long-term impact of the crisis and even more importantly the opportunities for the Olympic Movement. All your ideas and proposals will be consolidated in December this year, when the Executive Board will devise a working strategy for the post-corona Olympic world.

We all know that this journey will not be an easy one. We will have to give it our best to address the many challenges of an increasingly confrontational and ever more fragile world in deep crisis. But we sportspeople are used to giving it our best, we are used to embracing change, and we are used to seizing opportunities. We have demonstrated this in the last couple of months when we all together strengthened the relevance of sport in society. If we continue to stand together in this unity and solidarity, we can emerge from this crisis even stronger than before. The post-corona world needs sport to overcome the crisis. We stand ready to contribute to this recovery. The fragile post-corona world needs the unifying power of the Olympic Games. We are more determined than ever to build bridges, to bring the world together in peace and solidarity, to celebrate the unity of humankind in all our diversity.